

# Executive Report

*"I realized that in Alaska I found my way back to the troops, I'd reconnected with nature...and I was beginning to learn to derive my satisfactions from within."*<sup>2</sup>

## Purpose

This Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) guides the implementation of a natural resources program on Fort Richardson, Alaska, from 1998 through 2003. The program ensures the perpetuation of quality training lands to accomplish Fort Richardson's critical military mission by conserving natural resources and complying with environmental laws and regulations.

## Scope

This plan applies to organizations both internal and external to Fort Richardson that are involved with, or interested in, the management or use of Fort Richardson lands and natural resources. This includes active duty units, directorates, National Guard and Reserve Components, Federal and State agencies, private groups, and individuals. This INRMP is an integral part of the Fort Richardson Installation Master Plan.



*Fort Richardson's soldiers train in some of the world's harshest environments.*

military professionals in the world, and they train to win battles in some of the world's harshest environments.

This INRMP is designed to support the military mission by protecting and enhancing the training lands upon which the mission is critically dependent. The INRMP also addresses recreational opportunities associated with natural resources within the Fort Richardson community, thereby supporting USARAK's commitment to both the Quality of Life and the Communities of Excellence programs.

The INRMP identifies impacts of the military mission upon natural resources along with methods and means to mitigate these impacts. It does not attempt to evaluate Fort Richardson's military mission, nor does it replace any need or requirement for environmental documentation of the military mission at Fort Richardson.

## Environmental Compliance

This INRMP is required by the Sikes Act (16 U.S.C. 670a et seq.), Department

of Defense Directive 4700.4 (*Natural Resources Management Program*), and Army Regulation 200-3 (*Natural Resources—Land, Forest, and Wildlife Management*). In addition, this INRMP helps ensure that USARAK complies with other federal and state laws, most notably laws associated with environmental documentation, wetlands, endangered species, water quality, and wildlife management in

## Relationship to the Military Mission

U.S. Army Alaska (USARAK), headquartered at Fort Richardson, is responsible for the coordination of all U.S. Army resources in Alaska, the defense of Alaska, and worldwide deployment of troops and equipment to support the interests of the nation. Fort Richardson soldiers are among the most specialized

<sup>2</sup> Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf from *It Doesn't Take a Hero*

general. It outlines how USARAK will implement provisions of AR 200-3 and local regulations, most notably Army Regulation 190-13 (*Enforcement of Hunting, Trapping and Fishing on Army Lands in Alaska*) (U.S. Army, Alaska; 1994) and Army Regulation 350-2 (*Range Regulation*) (U.S. Army, Alaska; 1995).

This INRMP has Endangered Species Act implications. Review and signatory approval of this INRMP by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considered informal consultation with regard to the Endangered Species Act.

The Sikes Act, as amended in November 1997, requires that an INRMP address:

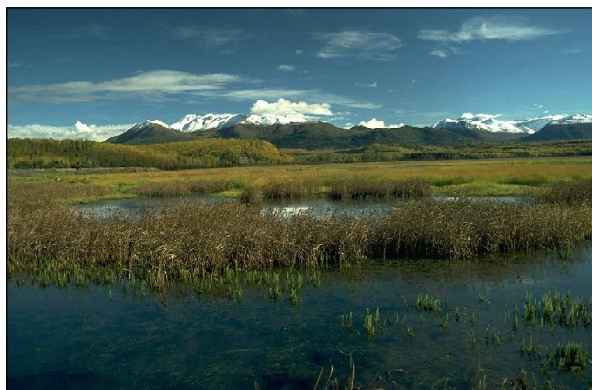
- ▶ Fish and wildlife management, land management, forest management, and fish and wildlife oriented recreation
- ▶ Fish and wildlife habitat enhancement/modifications
- ▶ Wetland protection, enhancement, and restoration where necessary for support of fish, wildlife, or plants
- ▶ Integration of, and consistency among, the various activities conducted under the plan
- ▶ Establishment of specific natural resource management goals and objectives and time frames for proposed action
- ▶ Public access to the military installation that is necessary or appropriate for sustainable use of natural resources by the public to the extent that such use is consistent with the military mission and the needs of fish and wildlife resources, subject to requirements necessary to ensure safety and military security
- ▶ Enforcement of applicable natural resource laws (including regulations)
- ▶ No net loss in the capability of military installation lands to support the military mission of the installation
- ▶ Regular review of this INRMP and its effects, at least every five years

- ▶ Provisions for spending hunting and fishing permit fees exclusively for the protection, conservation, and management of fish and wildlife, including habitat improvement, and related activities in accordance with the INRMP
- ▶ Exemption from procurement of services under Office of Management and Budget Circular A-76 and any of its successor circulars

## Ecosystem Status

Fort Richardson has five large native ecosystems: alpine, sub-alpine, forests, freshwater, and marine. The post has a wide variety of flora and fauna, none currently classified as threatened or endangered.

Water quality of both surface water and groundwater is very good. There are no indications of changes in the quality of surface water since Army occupation of the land, and very minor ground water pollution has been found in localized areas, none thought to affect human health.



*Fort Richardson has diverse ecosystems.*

The most obvious negative effect of Army activities over the last 40 years has been the contamination of soils in Eagle River Flats, now undergoing clean-up. Although there is no data regarding soil productivity trends, erosion has probably declined in recent years due to less troop activity on the ranges.

Even though past biological diversity trends were never documented, it is obvious that much of the land was disturbed prior to Army occupation. Fire scars reveal that forest fires, prior to military use of these lands, burned relatively large areas, causing

widespread disturbance to existing ecosystems. This is best evidenced by the predominance of even-aged timber stands. The most influential change in biological diversity that can be attributed to military use, outside of those areas that have been intensively developed (cantonment area, drop zones, small arms ranges, and recreational sites), occurred when tactical vehicles demolished mature trees (e.g. in the Davis Range area) during the 1950s and 1960s. The resultant enhanced vertical and horizontal forest structure has become highly productive wildlife habitat. None of the existing evidence indicates that the Army's activities have adversely affected biological diversity with the possible exception of Eagle River Flats. It is uncertain how biodiversity today compares with that of pre-settlement times.

The post clearly can support its current military mission. That capability is stable at present but remains highly dependent on the Command's ability to retain all of the post's remaining lands for their intended military training purposes.

At the present time there are 40,000 acres of native forests on Fort Richardson. Although some projects will require removal of forest, this will be on a small scale. The forested areas of white spruce killed by the spruce bark beetle (*Dendroctonus rufipennis*) will regenerate. There are no immediate plans to develop commercial sales of timber or forest products because the market for these products is poor. The forest cover on Fort Richardson provides a superb natural setting and realistic stage for the Army's training mission.

The ability of the ecosystems to support hunting and fishing improved with the Army's occupation of the land. In the 1950s and 1960s, troop training activities and mechanized vehicle testing altered sizable tracts of mature forest. Successional woody species provided excellent winter moose browse, allowing the Fort Richardson moose herd to expand. As troop movement became more mobile through helicopter use and fire suppression efforts increased, land use patterns and natural plant succession changed, resulting in the reduction of important winter habitat for moose. During this same period, the city of Anchorage began developing extensive areas of vacant land, further reducing the amount of available habitat and displacing additional moose to Fort Richardson. In 1975, the Army initiated a browse

rehabilitation program, which utilized mechanical methods to treat overmature habitat and promote resprouting and regeneration of the woody browse species. These treatments, in part, replace the role of natural fire in habitat mechanics.

Agriculture is not an option on Fort Richardson, as two-thirds of the land is forested coastal plain, while the remaining third is steep mountain slopes and alpine tundra unsuitable for agricultural use.

## Partnerships

This INRMP cannot be implemented by USARAK alone. In accordance with land withdrawal legislation and the ecosystem management philosophy, USARAK is forging partnerships with various agencies for managing its natural resources. Major partners in the implementation of this Plan include the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Other partners in this effort include universities, other federal and state agencies, private contractors, and private citizens.

## Plan Components

This INRMP outlines goals and policies in five general areas: stewardship, military readiness, quality of life, compliance, and program integration. It explains Fort Richardson's military mission in general terms, including the mission's impacts on natural resources. It describes Fort Richardson's climate, land base, facilities, and natural resources, including a brief legal and administrative history of natural resources management on Fort Richardson. The plan also lists agencies, organizations, and individuals involved in implementation of this INRMP.

This INRMP emphasizes ecosystem management, which is a departure from Fort Richardson's traditional multiple-use approach. This new approach is consistent with recent changes in laws and Department of Army policies. Ecosystem management will continue to allow the use of natural resources on Fort Richardson for both military and other human-related values and purposes. Ecosystem management has an over-riding goal of protecting the elements and functions of natural ecosystems. Since these ecosystems often extend beyond post bound-

aries, management plans for Fort Richardson's natural resources will place an increased emphasis on partnerships with its neighbors.

This INRMP is organized to promote the management of lands and natural resources in an integrated manner. Ecosystem management Sections (11-17) deal with aspects of overall natural resources stewardship: Inventory and Monitoring, Protection and Damage Prevention, Natural Resources Management; Research/Special Projects, Enforcement, and Awareness.

Described within the ecosystem management chapters are programs involving Integrated Training Area Management (ITAM), general fish and wildlife management, integrated pest control, natural resources law enforcement, research, and conservation education. Additional chapters involve outdoor recreation associated with natural resources (emphasizing hunting and fishing), protection of cultural resources during natural resources management operations, the use of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to insure protection and wise use of natural resources, and unresolved and biopolitical issues. A final chapter discusses specific measures to implement this plan.

## Planned Major New Initiatives

This INRMP includes a description of ongoing Natural Resources programs and projects. Most of these will either be continued or completed. There are important new initiatives within this INRMP. These include the following:

- ▶ Implement an ecosystem management philosophy
- ▶ Implement a complete ITAM program
- ▶ Enhance inventory and monitoring programs with regard to flora and fauna
- ▶ Continue to improve and more effectively use the geographic information system to enable better decisions regarding use and management of Fort Richardson natural resources
- ▶ Provide special protection for unique and sensitive natural resources areas in terms of special habitats, high value recreation, and biological richness

- ▶ Implement a forest management program to support the military mission and meet natural resources goals
- ▶ Enhance and maintain the quality and quantity of wildlife habitat
- ▶ Rehabilitate damaged training lands and erosion associated with roads
- ▶ Use habitat carrying capacity to determine wildlife harvest levels
- ▶ Consider alternatives to improve natural resources law enforcement
- ▶ Enhance the Watchable Wildlife program
- ▶ Implement special projects and research to support natural resources management
- ▶ Evaluate options to install a Fort Richardson hunting and fishing permit fee program
- ▶ Improve hunting harvest data collection using a new check-in, check-out system

Unresolved issues within this INRMP include:

- ▶ Spruce bark beetle (*Dendroctonus rufipennis*) - control is very difficult to effectively implement
- ▶ Bluejoint grass - few effective ways are available to control its spread
- ▶ Continual encroachment pressures - diminish military training, natural resources, and the integrity of Fort Richardson
- ▶ Hunting and fishing access fees - instituted in accordance with Department Army directives could contribute as much as \$20,000 annually for fish and wildlife management

## Ongoing Planning Activities

USARAK recognizes that this INRMP is not all encompassing and will, in coordination with other agencies develop specific management action plans, to be incorporated into this INRMP as they are completed. Descriptions of these plans (listed below), their compliance authorities, and budget priorities can be found in Appendix 1.

- ▶ Habitat Management Action Plan



- ▶ Wildlife Inventory and Monitoring Action Plan
- ▶ Wetland Management Action Plan
- ▶ Watchable Wildlife Action Plan
- ▶ Forest Management Action Plan
- ▶ Special Interest Areas Conservation Action Plan
- ▶ Outdoor Recreation Management Action Plan
- ▶ ITAM Action Plan
- ▶ Landscaping Action Plan
- ▶ Fire Management Action Plan
- ▶ Erosion Control Action Plan
- ▶ Wildlife/Natural Resources Enforcement Action Plan

While work on specific action plans remains to be completed, this INRMP uses existing information as a basis to continue and improve natural resources management while planning continues. An INRMP is required to be prepared and implemented with updates occurring every five years, regardless of the stage of program development. The INRMP is not a final product, rather it is a dynamic mechanism to guide program operation for the next five years.

## Benefits and Costs

- ▶ **Military Mission Benefits:** Implementation of this plan will insure the continued availability of superior training land. It will perpetuate mission realism through the use of naturally diverse and challenging settings. Additionally, the plan



*Fort Richardson provides a rich and challenging training arena.*

will improve the ability for long range planning at Fort Richardson.

- ▶ **Environmental Benefits:** The plan provides the basis for the conservation and protection of natural resources. It will reduce vegetation loss and soil erosion from military activities and decrease the potential for environmental pollution. It will improve water quality in riparian and aquatic ecosystems along with general biodiversity. Plan implementation will increase the overall knowledge of the operation of Fort Richardson ecosystems through surveys and research.
- ▶ **Other Benefits:** Troop environmental awareness will be heightened while training at Fort Richardson. Both community relations and Fort Richardson's environmental image, internal and external to the Department of Defense, will be enhanced. Quality of life for the Fort Richardson community and its neighbors will be improved. Plan implementation will decrease long term environmental reparation costs and reduce personal and USARAK liability from environmental noncompliance.
- ▶ **Costs:** It will cost about \$2,550,400 annually during 1998–2003 to implement this INRMP. Funding will come primarily from either conservation money or training funds designated for implementation of the ITAM program. Other dollars will be from special natural resources funds, forestry and perhaps fish and wildlife permit fees. Plan implementation will require staffing increases.

## Summary

The actions within this INRMP will comply with environmental laws, conserve and protect Fort Richardson's natural resources, improve Fort Richardson's relationship with the public, and enhance the military mission. Even though this plan will not resolve all existing and/or future environmental issues, it provides the guiding philosophy, personnel, and means to minimize and work toward resolution of such issues.